The Physical and Mental Criteria of Japanese Identity : Can Foreigners Make an Authentic Japanese Movie?

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> [There is a need to ask] tough, reflective questions about the role of race and cultural nationalism in both American and Japanese discourses on Japanese cinema. These questions invariably come down to misguided but deeply held assumptions about cultural authenticity. Who can make an "authentic" Japanese movie, and what are the criteria for doing so? Who is entitled to make that determination and why? Does one have to be Japanese to make a Japanese movie worth watching?[1]

The question of whether foreigners can make an authentic American movie seems pointless in the setting of Hollywood, which has from the very start welcomed, and at times depended on, the import of both foreign crew and cast. Perhaps because of its lack of interest in this question, Hollywood has played an important role in the development of world cinema, for instance in the case of early Japanese cinema, by providing a training ground for many directors, cameramen, and actors. And it was not only in sunny Southern California that the issue of authentic national identity of film was regarded as largely irrelevant. Even the low-key film industry in my native Holland enjoyed a very lively immigrant-cinema during the 1930s due to the many Jews who took refuge from the pogroms in Germany, and the combination of European co-productions and the advent of the multicultural society of the late twentieth century seems to have made attempts at categorisation by criteria of nationality or ethnicity increasingly complicated and meaningless. Nevertheless, there still are

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[1] This epigraph paraphrases Molasky 2003, substituting movies for jazz.

some criteria by which a Dutch movie can be distinguished from a foreign movie, even if only to decide which films can be shown at the Dutch Film Festival or nominated as the official Dutch entry for the Oscar competition in the category of best foreign (non-English spoken) movie. One may be somewhat surprised to discover that by these standards, for instance, many of Peter Greenaway's later works are categorised as Dutch movies.

However, in Japan things are not so easily decided on the basis of such facts as where the movie was funded and produced. A look at the two authoritative annual catalogues of Japanese films (*hōga* 邦画) and foreign films (*yōga* 洋画)[2] published by the Pia Cinema Club allows us to make some interesting observations.[3] There is clearly a double standard concerning the criterion of country of production. Whereas such famous "Japanese movies" as Ōshima Nagisa 大島渚's *Ai no korīda* 愛のコリーダ and Kurosawa Akira 黒沢明's *Ran* 乱 were often treated as French films (in recent editions the problem has been "solved" by listing them as both Japanese and foreign movies), "Chinese movies" made by Japanese producers and investors are not categorised as Japanese movies. While each dollar or euro a Japanese director receives seems to make his Japanese credentials and the claims to the Japaneseness of his movie suspect, no amount of Japanese yen can turn a movie made by a Chinese director into a Japanese one. It seems as if there is a double standard that decrees in the case of Japanese films that they have to be quintessentially Japanese.

Is there thus no way for a foreigner to make a Japanese film while everyone can make an American or European (or Dutch) film? The first one hundred years of Japanese cinema seem to hint that this is indeed the case. Let us have a look at the various productions by Westerners who tried to give a Japanese touch to their work or sometimes even had the ambition to

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[2] *Yōga*, literally Western films, is a term dating from the prewar times when almost without exception foreign films distributed in Japan were American or European. In 1999 the Pia Cinema Club changed the *hōga/yōga* rubrication into the more politically correct terms *Nihon eiga* 日本映画 and *gaikoku eiga* 外国映画.

[3] The *Shinema Kurabu* catalogue is published each year in April by Pia in its Pia Mooks series. I have predominantly used the 1993 and 2001/2002 editions for this article.

make a truly Japanese film, only to have the whistle blown on them by the Japanese critics, spectators, and/or distribution system.

Japan through the Eyes of the Western Intermediator

Most films about Japan made by Westerners are distinctively Western and have no ambition whatsoever to be regarded as Japanese films. They were produced by Western companies mostly in order to entertain and they almost without exception feature a male Westerner in the leading role in order to intermediate between the Western audience and the exotic background. These were definitely not attempts at "observing from within," and the results of this "observing from without" were often not even presented to the Japanese themselves. This genre, which strictly conforms itself to the dominant Western view of Japan and often takes the spectator to the premodern imaginary land of geisha, samurai, and ninja (or the slightly more modern variant of the latter two, the yakuza), is by a large margin the most popular variety of foreign films made in or about Japan and has left us with the most famous examples.

Although in the prewar period this genre does not seem to have been very substantial, two German films should be mentioned.[4] *Harakiri* (1919)

[4] In Hollywood, the place where several Japanese actors tried their luck and where there was a large community of Japanese immigrants in the near vicinity, a substantial series of films about Japan or featuring Japanese leading roles was made between 1913 and 1921. Some representative titles are *The Oath of Tsuru San* (1913), *The Wrath of the Gods* (1914), *The Typhoon* (1914), *The Cheat* (1915), *The Honorable Friend* (1916), *The Call of the East* (1917) *Her American Husband* (1918), *A Japanese Nightingale* (1919), *The Dragon Painter* (1919), *Bonds of Honor* (1919), *The Courageous Coward* (1919), *The Willow Tree* (1920), *The Breath of the Gods* (1920), *Locked Lips* (1920), *A Tokyo Siren* (1920) and *Black Roses* (1921). The majority of these Japan-related films were centred on Sessue Hayakawa 早川雪洲 and his wife Tsuru Aoki 青木鶴子, although more and more often, as the image of Japan in the United States deteriorated, the popular duo was cast as Chinese or other romantic Orientals. Due to the increasing anti-Japanese atmosphere both inside and outside the studio the couple decided in 1922 to seek their fortune elsewhere, mainly Japan and France, and with them the Hollywood

by Fritz Lang is one of the first full-length Western feature films set in Japan and is, notwithstanding its spectacular title, nothing but an early example of the long and continuing line of screen adaptations of the popular Madame Butterfly theme.[5] This earliest remaining work of the famous director of such classics of the expressionistic silent cinema as *Doktor Mabuse* and *Metropolis* is sadly not part of the public domain and thus hardly shown, but is definitely a must-see, even if only for the fact that Lang solved the problem of not being able to shoot the film in Japan or to assemble a large cast of Japanese actors by having the faces of his German actors painted yellow and having them "act as Japanese." The second to overcome these logistic problems of the prewar age and thus the second foreign director to make a full length feature film on Japanese soil was Arnold Fanck, the inventor of the mountain film genre of the Weimar Republic period and the mentor of Leni Riefenstahl.[6] Fanck, who by the mid-1930s was no longer able to make films in his native country, was lured to Japan in 1936 by film producer and importer Kawakita Nagamasa 川喜多長政 in the framework of the latter's quest to sell Japan and Japanese cinema to the rest of the world. In what probably is the second co-production with a Western country in Japan's film history[7]—the German

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phenomenon of Japan films vanished.

[5] Another early example is Sidney Ollcot's *Madame Butterfly* (1915), starring Mary Pickford as Cho-cho san. The title of *Die Geisha und der Samurai*, also made in Germany in 1919 and directed by Carl Boese, seems to suggest that this film is a true exhibition of orientalism.

[6] The first probably was Heinz Karl Heiland, who together with Kako Zanmu directed the silent film *Bushido* in Kyoto in 1926. The film was considered lost but has recently been discovered amongst a collection of German films in Russia. It is being restored and is scheduled to be screened at this year's Kyoto Film Festival. Some short Hollywood productions or parts of longer features had been filmed in Japan during the 1910s, such as *Jack's Chrysanthemum* (James Young, 1913), *The Door Between* (Rupert Julian, 1917) and *The Dragon's Net* (Henry MacRea, 1920).

[7] For information on prewar co-productions with Asian countries see Anderson and Richie 1982, pp.149-58. Most of these film projects were part and parcel of Japan's war effort, and some resulted in partly different versions, most notably *Shina no yoru* 支那の夜 (Fushimizu Osamu 伏水修 1940) with three different endings for

input consisting of the director, the cameraman, and one female actor—the rather stern and *bushidō*-idealising Dr. Arnold Fanck was ironically coupled with Itami Mansaku 伊丹万作, the *jidaigeki* director who had made a name for himself by ridiculing Japan's samurai class.[8] The clashes that ensued between these two strong personalities resulted in a unique development in film history: what had been planned as one international co-production developed into two separate national productions made with an identical crew and cast, but with different directors. The contrasting objectives of the two productions are probably best represented by their titles: the German *Die Tochter des Samurai* and the Japanese *Atarashiki tsuchi* 新しき土 (The New Earth, an indirect reference to the newly founded puppet state of Manchukuo).[9] The former was the first film about Japan by a major foreign director to be shown in the country itself, and the reactions to this Western filmic interpretation of Japan are representative of the fate that befell most examples of this genre. The novelty value of the film made it into a commercial success, but the critical response was harsh. Most Japanese critics could not detect the Japan they knew in the one depicted by Fanck, and neither were they pleased that *Die Tochter des Samurai* introduced their country to the outside world through a heavy-handed story of "the volcano-like sacrificing spirit of Japan" in combination with a nationalistic propaganda message of *blut und boden* and

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Japanese, Chinese, and Southeast Asian audiences. For what probably is the most bewildering chapter in Japan's postwar history of international film co-productions, see Irina Melnikova's two-part article on Soviet-Japanese co-productions during the Cold War era (Melnikova 2002).

[8] One of the most unfortunate things for the study of prewar Japanese cinema is that so few of the works of the two innovators of the *jidaigeki* 時代劇 genre Itami Mansaku and Yamanaka Sadao 山中貞雄 have survived. In the case of Itami only *Kokushi musō* 国士無双 (1932) and *Akanishi Kakita* 赤西蠣太 (1936) remain as proof of his brilliance.

[9] The Itami Mansaku version of this project, *Atarashiki tsuchi*, is in the possession of the Film Center of the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo, but is hardly ever screened and only available to accredited film scholars, in accordance with terms of its bequest by producer Kawakita Nagamasa.

lebensraum.[10] Moreover, I cannot help feeling that the setting of the beautiful traditional Japanese villa of archpatriarch Yamato—with the backdrop of Mt. Fuji, looking out over Miyajima and in walking distance of Kamikōchi—was too gross for any Japanese to be able to take the film seriously.[11]

There is hardly any need to mention that the years of the Pacific War spawned numerous films in which Japan and/or the Japanese were portrayed through Western (mostly American) eyes, but all of these are best placed within the category of war propaganda and I will refrain from discussing them here in detail. Suffice it to say that the main objective of these products of war was to justify or make easier the killing of the enemy by the simple means of depicting Japanese—usually impersonated by Chinese or other Asians with a serious lack of Japanese conversation skills—as vile inhuman male monsters with a brutal taste for blonde Western women.[12] This hostile portrayal of Japan, which of course had its roots in the strong anti-Japanese sentiment on the American West Coast since the late 1910s, lingered on in *Tokyo Joe* (Stuart Heisler, 1949), a Humphrey Bogart vehicle set in a Tokyo where even the women were depraved and war criminals were still on the loose. However, apart from this exceptional production, which appears to have been filmed on location in war-devastated Tokyo but was actually made in the relatively free environment of Hollywood, no other film about the current situation in Japan reached the Western screens during the period the country was occupied. In a kind of parallel with SCAP policy that did not allow Japanese films to show the presence of the American forces, it was evidently thought unwise, in an era of decolonization, to remind those outside Japan of the fact that the country was occupied by a Western power. Accordingly the Japan of the occupation period remained invisible to the outside world.

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[10] Anderson and Richie 1982, pp. 148-49.

[11] For a detailed analysis of this lovely piece of Nazi orientalism, see Hansen 1997 and 2001. Another example of Japan-related orientalism is the French film *Yoshiwara* by Max Ophüls, which is also from 1937 and features Sessue Hayakawa.

[12] See Dower 1986 and various articles in Nornes and Fukushima 1994.

This resulted in the interesting circumstance that almost all of the considerable number of American "occupation movies" were made during the latter half of the 1950s, after the occupation had ended and Japan had regained its independence. This had nothing to do with Hollywood all of a sudden pinpointing Japan as a special place of interest for the American audience, but rather it reflected America's priorities within the framework of the Cold War. Japan had to be turned into a strong bulwark of "the free world" against the communist forces and therefore needed to be supported in the reconstruction of its economy in every way. One of these ways was to stop money from flowing out of the country and with this objective the very successful American film industry was not allowed to ship back home the substantial profits it had accumulated on the Japanese market. The solution the studios came up with was using the local profits to produce films in Japan that would sell in America, thus transferring their profits to their West Coast accounts via an indirect route. With the home audiences in mind, American producers usually sent one male film star who could carry a film on his own, such as Marlon Brando or John Wayne, to Japan in the hope that the exotic *couleur locale* (including a female counterpart who could deliver a few sensual but subservient lines in English—the words prominently featured on the advertising poster for *Sayonara*, "I am not allowed to love. But I will love you if that is your desire" can be regarded as typical) would do the rest. The history of American-Japanese relations did not extend far back, and highlights sufficiently noteworthy and intriguing to serve as the material for a whole film were in short supply. Perhaps for this reason, film makers found it difficult to make the American presence in Japan credible, and there was little variety. John Wayne in *The Barbarian and the Geisha* (John Huston, 1958) was presented with the role of the first American consul, Townsend Harris, but the bulk of these films took the easiest and least costly option by using modern settings and turning their lead actors into U.S. army personnel serving in Japan. The best-known of these films are *House of Bamboo* (Samuel Fuller, 1955, starring Robert Ryan and Robert Stack), *Sayonara* (Joshua Logan, 1957, starring Marlon Brando) and *The Geisha Boy* (Frank Tashlin, 1958, starring Jerry Lewis), but the most worthy of note is undoubtedly *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (Daniel Mann, 1956), because of the unusual Okinawan

setting, Marlon Brando's atypical comical role, and the fact that the Americans for once ridicule their own democratizing mission.

None of these films, though, was commercially successful, nor has any made a lasting impact on film history. It is hardly surprising that when the economic restrictions were lifted in the early 1960s, Hollywood immediately discontinued its Japanese production line. Still, one has to admit that collectively these post-occupation "occupation movies" definitely set the tone for the future of the genre of films on Japan seen through the eyes of the Western intermediator. Within the framework of the Cold War and the American-Japanese security treaties, the negative or outright hostile depiction of the preceding decades was of course completely out of the question. From the 1950s, the country and its people were predominantly shown in a positive way. To a large extent, as can be gathered from the above-mentioned film titles, this paid tribute to the orientalist Japan-fixation of an earlier age. There were crucial differences, however, for instance in the sense that there was not merely a stress on the heterogeneity and mystery of Japan, but also on the fact that there nonetheless was a lot to learn and sometimes even to understand. Moreover, whereas prewar films had tended to highlight passionate but dramatic and often fatal encounters between East and West, there was now often true friendship, not seldom resulting in marriage, symbolising the new Japanese-American relationship as allies.[13] One thing that did not change and that clearly showed that the relationship of the new allies was not equal but hierarchical is the fact that the Western protagonist is without exception a male, waited upon by a Japanese female love interest elegantly dressed in kimono.[14] The only innovation here, in line with the orientalist wet dream,

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[13] There are several films dating from this period that convey the message that true love will overcome racist prejudices and interracial American-Japanese marriages are perfectly all right, such as *Japanese War Bride* (King Vidor, 1952), *Three Stripes in the Sun* (Richard Murphy, 1955), and *Bridge to the Sun* (Étienne Perier, 1962). Yet *Sayonara* is an even more symbolic example because the final parting of the lovers in the original novel by James A. Michener was changed into a happy ending of marriage and children.

[14] Two films discussed earlier, the prewar *Die Tochter des Samurai* and the occupation period *Tokyo Joe* are useful material for comparison. In the former,

is the development that the latter will take off her kimono for the almost inevitable "Japanese bath" scene. All major Japan-related movies since the late 1960s—the James Bond episode *You Only Live Twice* (Louis Gilbert, 1967, starring Sean Connery), *The Yakuza* (Sidney Pollack, 1974, starring Robert Mitchum), the film version of the immensely successful and influential novel and television series *Shogun* (Jerry London, 1980, starring Richard Chamberlain), *Black Rain* (Ridley Scott, 1989, starring Michael Douglas) and *Mr. Baseball* (Fred Schepisi, 1992, starring Tom Selleck)—stick closely to the rules of the genre. The only Japan-related Dutch film of the last two decades, the low budget *Felice, Felice* (Peter Delpeut, 1998) in which mid-nineteenth-century Yokohama is soberly but tastefully recreated in a small Amsterdam studio, also neatly fulfills the criteria. Although films such as *Rising Sun* (Philip Kaufman, 1993) may sporadically turn things upside down, in the sense that a disharmonious relation between the two countries is emphasized by means of malicious Japanese men victimizing blonde Western women, these seem mere incidents at times when American-Japanese relations are overstrained by trade conflicts and the United States—including the film industry—is at a loss to find itself a credible potential enemy. Judging by the recent success of the Hollywood blockbuster *Last Samurai* (Edward Zwick, 2003, starring Tom Cruise), the genre of the "foreigner in Japan" with the concomitant genre codes is most likely to remain the dominant variety within the group of films about Japan made by Westerners.

Considering the fact that this genre of course is based on the presumption that the cultural differences between Japan and "the West" are almost insurmountable—to cite the title of yet another recent eye-catching example, in spite of the presence of our Western interpreter something gets

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which despite its title was primarily focused on Japan's martial spirit, an interracial love story was out of the question as it would fundamentally undermine the Nazis' race theories. In the latter movie the Japanese are depicted in such an unflattering and degrading way that Humphrey Bogart's love interest could only be as white as snow. For a more profound analysis of race, sex and discursive strategies in Hollywood fiction, see Marchetti 1993.

Lost in Translation—it is very interesting to see that the Japanese themselves have of late become active in this genre as well. The first result of this Japanese-made "Japan through the eyes of the Western intermediator" initiative is Morimoto Isao 森本功's *Ichigen-san* いちげんさん, which was released in 1999. The film is based on a Japanese book with the same title by a Swiss author who recounts his experiences as a foreign student in Kyoto at the end of the 1980s. It is exceptional in the sense that it is a true "observation from within," and does not once try to make us marvel at the strangeness of Japan. Apart from the few signs of frustration the lead actor shows because the Japanese will not treat him as Japanese, the film is very much about reveling in the many beautiful sides of Japan. As the love story unfolds we get all the usual idyllic shots from the historic cultural capital of Japan and the two protagonists ultimately find each other in their shared love for modern Japanese literature. And why shouldn't a film stress the proximity of Japan, when it has been produced by a Japanese film company in co-operation with the city of Kyoto, and is aimed at the Japanese audience? This could very well have been the first authentic Japanese film made by foreigners in Japan, when one considers that the writer of the novel, the cameraman, and the main actor are foreign and the director/scriptwriter is half foreign. The movie is also officially a Japanese movie and was distributed as such (Is Japan the only country where we still have cinemas that show only Japanese or only foreign movies?). The Japanese audience, however, was not ready to be "fooled." Why not, we may ask. The picture of Japan itself in *Ichigen-san* was not uncomfortable. The image of Kyoto as an undefiled orientalist oasis is one that Japanese are continuously (force-) fed by the indigenous media and tourist industries and one that only some residents might contest. But no matter how impressive the Japanese language skills of leading actor Edward Atterton, and despite the fact that the voice-over is in Japanese, what proved too exotic for the "locals" was the film's proposition that a young white foreigner is capable of enjoying, in a leisurely fashion, all that Kyoto has to offer. This was even more so because those joys included the generous sexual services of a blind but beautiful young woman who, with the full consent of her mother, is left in the dubious custody of a blond-haired young man. And the whole thing became completely

indigestible as this young woman was portrayed by Suzuki Honami 鈴木保奈美, who was the object of the fantasies of many Japanese men at the time. Almost surely quite stimulated by the first-ever nude stills of Honami that ended up in the gossip magazine *Focus* long before the premiere of the movie, these men were definitely not going to pay for a cinema ticket to see her swoon at readings of Mori Ōgai 森鴎外's *Maihime* 舞姫 and Abe Kōbo 安部公房's *Suna no onna* 砂の女—and eventually get laid by a foreigner.

All-Japanese Cast

The best way to avoid the problem of Western actors obstructing the authentic Japanese outlook of a film is of course to stick to an all-Japanese cast. Up until now there have not been many foreign directors who have adopted this drastic measure (if only for the simple reason that in general they are more focused on the American box office than the Japanese). There are a few exceptions, though, the first being Josef von Sternberg's *The Saga of Anatahan* (1953), a "postscript to the Pacific conflict" that was the last movie made by the man who turned Marlene Dietrich into a screen heroine. It is based on the true story of a crew marooned on the island Anatahan in 1944, who are so busy fighting amongst themselves for the favors of queen bee Keiko, the only woman on the island, and a gun, the fastest way to get the girl, that it takes them until 1951 to face facts and surrender. The theme of the Japanese going barbarian in a way similar to that described in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is not unfamiliar to Japanese cinema, and Imamura Shōhei 今村昌平 has made a career out of showing mankind in its bare beastliness, but in 1953 the Japanese were not yet affluent enough to be able to enjoy the luxury of such an ironic look at themselves. The film was completely manned and staffed by Japanese, and the dialogues are in Japanese as well, but these are drowned out by the American voice-over by the director himself. Von Sternberg was well known for his complete domination of the film making process, one reason why he was no longer able to make (or finish) films in the United States after the war. In the case of *Anatahan*, he came to Japan at the invitation of Kawakita Nagamasa, but, in contrast to Arnold Fanck, he had come at his

own expense and he functioned as co-producer of the project. In order to take away any doubt about who was in total command, the opening credits stated, "Written, photographed and directed by Josef von Sternberg." The film was thus clearly not a genuinely Japanese product and was meant for American audiences. It proved a complete disaster. "Von Sternberg fiddled with it for years, changing the title five times and in 1957 having his cameraman shoot some nude scenes which he spliced into the prints. Nothing helped."[15] At the time it was distributed in Japan, the film met with slightly more success, but it was almost completely forgotten, and only recently has it been rediscovered and reevaluated by Von Sternberg aficionados.

Another example of a film with an all-Japanese cast by a Western director is Paul Schrader's *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* (1985), a highly stylized biographical picture of the life and work of Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫. Although it is quite well known in the West, it has been forbidden to be screened in Japan by Mishima's widow. Regrettably it was thus never allowed to stand the test whether the Japanese audience would accept it as a Japanese film, possibly in a local version in which the English voice-over of Mishima would be replaced with Japanese. Yet another example could have been the screen adaptation of Arthur Golden's 1997 million-seller *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Although this project, which was already started in the wake of the book's success, probably would have involved not an all-Japanese but an all-Asian cast (rumor had it that the lead role of the geisha Sayuri was set to be played by Hong Kong film star Maggie Cheung), it was exactly the fear of denial by the Japanese public that made the initial director Stephen Spielberg eventually back out. He is said to have taken heed of Kurosawa Akira's candid advice that it would be inappropriate for a film set in Japan to have dialogue in English.[16]

The one film made during the last century in Japan by a Western director with an all-Japanese cast and with no Western voice-over, and thus

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[15] Gallagher 2002, p. 4.

[16] *Kinema Junpō* キネマ旬報, no.1396 (January 2004), p.14. The movie has been rescheduled for distribution in 2005 and the new director Rob Marshall and his staff are presently screentesting Asians with a good command of English.

with the best credentials to become the first Western made Japanese movie, is *Tokyo Eyes* (1998) by the young French film director Jean Pierre Limosin. The title is somewhat ironic when one knows that the original script was written for a movie set in Paris and was haphazardly transferred to the Japanese metropole without changing the dialogues. In spite of the ongoing current of globalization in our world, it is therefore perfectly legitimate to wonder to what extent Japan will be observed, whether from within or without. In my opinion this movie tells us hardly anything about the country in which it is set and, as a Belgian film scholar noted, has merely led to the ambiguous result of Japanese teenagers communicating like their French counterparts (which is nonetheless refreshing if one is fed up with the either extremely violent or introvert products of young Japanese directors).[17] Does this make *Tokyo Eyes* into a French film? Although it was indeed distributed as such in Japan, the French lawmakers (who are very strict on the percentage of pure homegrown product French cinemas have to show) have firmly rejected this interpretation. The Nihon Eiga Senmon Channeru 日本映画専門チャンネル, a satellite television channel that exclusively broadcasts Japanese films, has also included it in its menu. The Pia film bible avoids taking a stand and has chosen the option of listing it as both a Japanese and a foreign movie, thus making it into a dubious "Japanese movie" and leaving the problem up to the local video rental shop to decide.

Hors-concours: Extremely Personal Observations/Discoveries of Japan

Apart from the feature films discussed above there is, of course, also a rich supply of documentaries in which Western documentary makers immerse themselves in Japan in order to present the various attractions and mysteries of the country and its culture. Some relatively well known representatives of this species are Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1982), Wim Wenders' *Tokyo-ga* (1985) and Daniel Schmid's *Das Geschriebene Gesicht* (1995). The famous feature film *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959) by Alain Resnais might also fit into this category. These arthouse documentaries

[17] Van Haute 2002, p. 31.

about Japan made by European directors are of course clear examples of "observing Japan from within," although Japan in these cases is personified by such extraordinary figures as film director Ozu Yasujirō 小津安二郎 and kabuki actor (*onnagata* 女形) Bandō Tamasaburō 坂東玉三郎, and one can seriously wonder to what extent these movies were influenced by the directors' experiences in Japan rather than by strong and selective views they formed before ever setting foot in the country. In either case, these documents and travel essays are so personal—the directors are either visibly or audibly present—that these could never become Japanese movies. And apart from that, one can hardly expect a Japanese audience to be able easily to digest such things as the comparison between Japan and West Africa that provides the basic structure of *Sans Soleil*.

Provisional Conclusion

To become (qualify as) "Japanese movies," films by Japanese directors can be set all around the world as long as the leading actors are Japanese, but movies with a Japanese lead actor by foreign directors (e.g. Nagase Masatoshi 長瀬正敏 in *Cold Fever*, Asano Tadanobu 浅野忠信 in *Last Life in the Universe*, and numerous recent Hong Kong productions) definitely have to be set in Japan. A Western lead actor will be fatal (*Felice, Felice*, *Ichigen-san*, *Last Samurai*), and even a predominantly Japanese cast (*Die Tochter des Samurai*) or completely Japanese cast will not do the trick. Indeed a mostly Japanese cast or wholly Japanese cast merely seems to create a feeling of disharmony in a foreign director's film, especially when the voice over is English (*Anatahan*). In the end there seems to be something like a purely Japanese touch and/or a uniquely Japanese atmosphere (something that advocates of nihonjinron often like to express by such concepts as *mono no aware* 物の哀れ and *mu* 無) that has resulted in the situation that there are many Ozu aficionados around the world but no foreign Ozu's and, thus, no Japanese films made by foreigners … until three years ago.[18]

[18] I have to confess that after the proofreading stage of this article I became aware of the existence of the film *Keiko* (1979) by Canadian director Claude Gagnon.

The First Westerner-Made Pure Japanese Movie

In *Ichiban utsukushii natsu* いちばん美しい夏 (English title *Firefly Dreams*, 2001) John Williams does the trick with the story of an obstinate *ganguro* ガングロ high school girl who is sent off deep into the beautiful countryside of Aichi prefecture for her summer vacation and through her discovery of the many wonders of this heterogenic Japanese world attains a subtle inner revolution.[19] Although one has to admit that in this *Bildung*-film there is clearly some idea(idyl)lization of the Japanese countryside—Williams has chosen the very lovely village of Hōrai 鳳来町 which is remarkably void of highways, convenience stores, pachinko parlors, adult video vending machines, televisions, computers and the usual plastic and concrete symbols of modern civilization—it has not been overdone. Just as the scenes of Nagoya at the beginning of the film do not present us with the futuristic cityscapes for which directors like Tarkovsky once came all the way to Japan, neither do the scenes of the countryside provide us with the unruptured orientalist paradise abounding with servile local women that many other foreign directors have presented us with. Here we are merely in a self-sufficient and somewhat isolated world, where some of the older inhabitants in the distant past may have had some less pleasant experiences in their self-inflicted confrontation with China, but where nowadays the only external and distant points of reference or, for the younger few, objects of adoration, are Nagoya and Tokyo. Or maybe we should rather read "Cardiff and London," because the script of the film was originally written in English with the Welsh countryside of the director's youth in mind. It was only at a later stage that it was translated into Japanese and placed in a Japanese setting.

However, and here we get to the essence of this first Westerner-made

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Since it is classified in the Shinema Kurabu catalogue as a Japanese film, this might very well be the first authentic Japanese film made by a foreign director, but I am afraid I have not been able to get a hold of it yet.

[19] In contrast to some of the other films discussed above, the Pia Cinema Club is not ambiguous about the Japanese descent of this film and accordingly it is only included in the catalogue of Japanese films.

Japanese film, in spite of the self-written script it is very hard to find any strong personal touch to this movie. This is not to say that the whole thing lacks feeling and leaves one cold, but the credit for this seems to be due to the quality of the actors rather than to the merits of the script. There is no distinct atmosphere (as marks movies by, for example, Oguri Kōhei 小栗康平), story (Koreeda Hirokazu 是枝裕和), view of mankind (Imamura Shōhei), message (Kurosawa Akira), camerawork (Sōmai Shinji 相米慎二), structure (Ozu Yasujirō) or any other content or style elements (such as the gags of Kitano Takeshi 北野武 or the over-the-top violence of Miike Takashi 三池崇史) that stand out. This is especially remarkable when one compares *Ichiban utsukushii natsu* with *Moe no suzaku* 萌の朱雀 (1997) by Kawase Naomi 川瀬直美. For her feature film debut Kawase also went deep into the countryside, namely her home village of Nishi-Yoshino 西吉野村 in Nara prefecture, but she returned with a highly personal product that showed both her own family history and the present state of the Japanese countryside, and featured a conspicuous image language of her own. Williams does include a few obvious citations from the oeuvre of Ozu Yasujirō in his movie, but regrettably has nothing much personal to offer. It may therefore be concluded that the first Western-made authentic Japanese film is the result of the director's sacrifice of his own personality. It was only by doing away with his foreign identity that he could avoid every possible "foreign" element in his film.

I am not saying that I would not welcome a "true Japanese film" by a foreign director, but at present I find that Japan, except for a few multicultural neighborhoods in Tokyo, is still a society where foreigners cannot but be almost constantly aware of the fact that they are indeed "strangers" or, as some more cynically inclined expats tend to translate the Japanese term "*gaijin*" 外人, "extraterrestrials." In a country where the majority of the "aboriginals" find it impossible not to be aware of the fact that a non-Japanese looking person is a foreigner (every well-meant "*Nihongo o-jōzu desu ne*" 日本語お上手ですね will tell you just that), I cannot understand how a foreigner can or would want to act as if he were a Japanese and make a genuine but also non-outspoken Japanese movie.

Be that as it may, the Japanese critique of Williams' effort was quite pleased with the fact that a young foreign film director was so kind as to

take up the good old Japanese tradition of "*kazoku no omoiyari* 家族の思い遣り," "*yasashisa* 優しさ," "*kizuna* 絆" and "*kokoro* 心." Japanese colleagues bestowed on Williams the 2001 award for best new director.[20] However, as far as the impact of the film is concerned, I think it is more telling that I cannot find one reference to a related magazine article through the Internet, that *Ichiban utsukushii natsu* ended in seventy-fifth place (out of eighty-five) in the 2001 *Kinema Junpō* rankings, that I could not find one video store in Osaka or Kyoto which could help me to a copy of it, and that in order to obtain it I found myself for the first time in my life ordering a DVD through the channels of Internet commerce. The Japanese public, probably with the exception of certain enclaves in Aichi prefecture, seems to have totally ignored this first true Japanese film by a Western director. In my opinion the failure of *Ichiban utsukushii natsu* to make a splash is for the simple reason that the Japanese audience gets enough of the *kazoku no omoiyari* message on their tv-screens, and they will not go out and pay to see more of it if there are no big stars and special effects to support the message. There was of course the novelty added-value of the foreign director, but why go out and see a foreigner do something in a way basically identical to that of an average Japanese director? Outside Japan, the novelty value of the first Japanese film made by a Westerner got Williams some invitations and even prizes, but these were not from prominent international film festivals, and the film has not been distributed outside Japan. One of the few foreign reviews I could find on the internet made clear why: "Leider kann man dem Film ankreiden, dass er stellenweise zu wenig Biss hat."[21] It lacks that extra "bite" needed to make an impression on and remain in the spectator's mind.

Conclusion

From my humble point of view, both Japanese cinema and society

[20] See for instance the recommendations by colleagues Shindō Kaneto 新藤兼人 and Wakamatsu Kōji 若松孝二, and Ashigawa Tomoko 芦川倫子, listed on the website of John Williams' production company 100 Meter Films. Williams 2001.
[21] Cineclub 2002.

could indeed do with a little more spice, no matter whether that is provided by Japanese or foreigners. In this respect all cinematic efforts by non-Japanese directors, both "observations from within" and "observations from without," are more than welcome. Nonetheless, precisely because the latter so often offer superficial portrayals of Japan that they almost invariably end up being dismissed—especially within the country itself—with the comment that "this is not life but Hollywood," it seems likely that well-founded and inspired "observations from within" stand a much better chance of making a substantial contribution to stimulating the Japanese minds. The problem as to whether such projects would benefit from an "official" hallmark as being a "Japanese film" in order to have maximum impact leads us back to the question at the outset of this article, "Can foreigners make an authentic Japanese film?" It will be evident that the answer to this question has to be positive, at least as of three years ago. However, this observation should be qualified with the comment that with the present criteria and preconditions for a "Japanese film," one can only wonder why a foreigner would want to make the effort. One can only hope that all sorts of multinational and multicultural projects will soon break down the barrier of the Japanese film/foreign film divide.

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